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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 000792

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: INTERIOR MINISTER ON MAHALLA RIOTS, DETENTIONS OF
DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS, AND MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

REF: A. CAIRO 697
[1](#)B. CAIRO 715
[1](#)C. CAIRO 724
[1](#)D. CAIRO 730
[1](#)E. CAIRO 785

Classified By: Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone, for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In an April 15 farewell call with Interior Minister Habib El Adly, the Ambassador raised USG concern about the recent detentions of opposition activists, as well as the tough sentences handed down that day against 25 senior members of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) by a military tribunal. Unmoved, Adly confirmed that the GOE will prosecute leading democracy activist George Isshaq and Israa Abdel Fattah, an opposition Ghad party member who allegedly started the call for a general strike on the internet networking site Facebook, on charges of inciting the April 6 general strike (ref A) and subsequent violent demonstrations. Adly said that the April 6-7 riots in the Nile Delta mill-town of Mahalla (refs A-C) were attributable to frustration over rising prices, as well as quiet encouragement from the MB, but that the situation is fully under control, and that "this is just a seasonal sandstorm." End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador began the meeting by raising police responses to the April 6 general strike, the follow-on April 6-7 riots in Mahalla, and the tough sentences issued by a military tribunal against 25 senior Muslim Brotherhood (MB) members, which had been announced only moments before the meeting began (ref E). He noted America's experience during the Vietnam War years, when police crackdowns against civilian protesters, such as the infamous 1970 shooting of students at Kent State University, tipped mainstream, majority popular opinion against the Johnson administration. In those days, campus radicals explicitly aimed to provoke police over-reaction against ordinary citizens, as part of their revolutionary theory to turn the people against the state. It appeared to us that, with the use of military courts and harsh police actions, the GOE now was playing a game designed by radicals who might actually welcome prison terms to advance their revolutionary cause.

[1](#)3. (C) Relaxed and expansive, Adly replied that the US was entitled to have its point of view, but that, "you don't have a full understanding of the situation." He repeatedly remarked that the USG "believes the wrong people," and "listens too much to the political opposition, rather than to us. We are in touch with all these people, and we know who are reasonable and who have more radical purposes."

MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD-HAMAS-IRAN NEXUS?

14. (C) Adly sounded familiar GOE points about the MB being a terrorist organization, and also said that, as the MB supports Hamas, and Hamas is supported by Iran, there is a worrying connection between the MB and Iran, with Iran apparently funding the MB. He noted that the primary goal of the military tribunals was to hurt the MB financially, "so that they stop funding Hamas." (Note: The 25 senior MB members who were sentenced on April 15 by a military tribunal to prison terms ranging between 3-10 years included many wealthy businessmen, as well as Khayrat El Shatir, the third-most senior member of the MB's leadership, who reportedly was responsible for the organization's finances. End note). When queried by the Ambassador as to whether there was actual proof that the MB was receiving international funding, Adly said no documentary proof exists, but that the GOE is convinced nonetheless, through its "analysis," as "it is impossible that they raise all their money through donations from within the MB membership. Clearly, they are getting funds from outside Egypt, and then sending it on to Hamas." Adly also noted that the MB has been hit hard by the GOE's targeting of its financiers, because part of the MB's strategy in recruiting members is through financial support. "Before, when an MB member was detained, the MB paid his legal fees. Now," he said, "the organization cannot afford to do that - it cannot even support the families of the detained members."

15. (C) Adly remarked that President Mubarak is convinced that the US rejects the MB's ideas. "But, we still reject dialogue between the US and the MB, because the MB only gains from it." He also commented that, "most of the Egyptian public" does not support the MB, but that nevertheless, even some in the National Democratic Party (NDP) leadership want

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to cooperate with the MB. He said that "terrible idea" had been pushed back, and that the NDP was now focusing on youth outreach, so as to better combat the Islamists. However, he noted later in the conversation that "some in the opposition are reasonable. Even among the MB, there are some with better ideas, such as Mahmoud Ezzat (the MB's secretary-general), and even some past MB Supreme Guides."

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Adly also mused that, "we have come a long way towards democracy and human rights," noting that the sentences given to the 25 MB members by the military tribunals were relatively light; "Before, they would have gotten 1000 years in prison - seven years is not a tough sentence!" He professed surprise that the tribunals had found innocent 15 of the 40 persons on trial.

"THE SITUATION IS UNDER CONTROL, THIS IS JUST A SANDSTORM"

16. (C) With regard to the April 6 general strike and the rioting in Mahalla, Adly tied the unrest squarely to recent price increases, which he said, "are not a result of the government not being able to provide for the citizens, but rather a global problem that is reflecting on us." He noted that prices are a "huge issue," further magnified by Egypt's ever-burgeoning population growth. Adly said that government employees are hit particularly hard by price increases - "a professor at a university now makes less than a plumber!" - but that such public employees "do not amount to more than 4 million people."

17. (C) Adly said most of the demonstrators in Mahalla were "thugs, thieves, and kids, not workers." He alleged that the MB encouraged the riots "from below," and that the MB was very strong in the Mahalla area. He conceded that the Mahalla workers had had legitimate grievances against their own former union chief, who had failed to represent them well. He was replaced some months previously, and the

current union leader had won substantive increases from management, which ultimately satisfied the workers themselves, and led to their decision not to participate in the strike. The "strike" at Mahalla was clearly done by outside provocateurs who sought to exploit the workers' grievances and popular reaction to rising prices, but in fact the outsiders had no direct interests with the workers. (Comment: Independent sources confirm this is broadly true. End comment).

18. (C) Adly flagged repeatedly throughout the meeting that, "These are different, trying circumstances, but they do not represent a threat to the state." He said that the instigators are "unpatriotic forces" and "criminals," who will continue with "these childish efforts", such as on May 4 (Mubarak's birthday), the date for the next general strike called for by some opposition forces, "but the main issue is, we will get this bread problem solved, and then this will peter out." He noted, "as the official responsible for national stability, I can tell you that the situation is totally under control, this is just a seasonal sandstorm." Adly also commented, "Changing a government is not an easy operation - it requires far more than a few demonstrations here and there."

19. (C) Returning to the analysis of the theories and purposes of revolutionary provocateurs, the Ambassador questioned the wisdom of GOE prosecution of deputy Kefaya leader George Isshaq, and even more so, of the much younger and obviously idealistic, non-violent Israa Abdel Fattah, a young Ghad party member who allegedly started the Facebook call for the April 6 strike. (Both had been detained in the aftermath of April 6 and then released, but still face charges of inciting the general strike, ref D). Adly made clear the government plans to prosecute Isshaq, and likely Israa too. "There is a crime, and then there must be a punishment. George Isshaq will be tried - he was one of the main instigators of all of this. And Israa Abdel Fattah started the call for the strike on the internet. Her role in inciting this is clear, and she will face consequences." The Ambassador commented that such prosecutions, especially against Israa, would appear to us, Europeans, and many Egyptians to be excessive. We believed they would only generate domestic and international opinion against the GOE. Adly responded that "The stability of the state is essential." The Ambassador again urged that it is critical for the state to find a balance between stability and the rights of citizens, to which Adly retorted, "And what about the rights of the state? The most important issue of all of these is maintaining stability." RICCIARDONE